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DE RUEHLB #0405/01 0791413
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191413Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1321
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3178
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2055
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2326
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000405

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [FR](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: RESIGNED FM SALLOUKH ON PRESIDENTIAL
POSTPONEMENT, POSTERS

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY. Charge Sison met with &resigned8 FM Salloukh, at his request, on March 14. Salloukh raised concerns about the White House spokesperson,s characterization of the sixteenth postponement of Lebanon,s presidential elections. In return, Salloukh got an earful on our displeasure over the prominent display of graphic anti-U.S. and anti-UN posters that appeared at several Beirut locations. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) MFA Protocol Secretary Ambassador George Siam telephoned CDA on March 12 with the unusual request to meet with &resigned8 FM Salloukh. A career diplomat, Salloukh was one of the six Shia ministers who tendered their resignations in November 2006 (although the resignations have not yet been accepted). While the Embassy deals with Acting FM Mitri on policy issues, some topics (including the signing of an MOU between the US and GOL on bilateral assistance) remain under the purview of Salloukh's team. CDA noted the Salloukh request to March 14 Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamedeh, along with the idea of using the appointment to hit Salloukh on Hizballah,s recent plastering of several areas of Beirut with graphic anti-U.S. and anti-UN posters. (Salloukh has no political party affiliation but was brought into the Siniora cabinet in 2005 as a Shia member during negotiations with Hizballah.) Hamedeh expressed enthusiasm for the idea, and later took copies of the posters to use during his upcoming trip to the United States as examples of Hizballah propaganda.

WHITE HOUSE ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION POSTPONEMENT

13. (C) Salloukh opened the meeting by noting sincerely that his intent was to have a friendly discussion. After about thirty minutes of niceties, he asked Charge about recent comments made by the White House Press Secretary, in which she described the sixteenth postponement of Lebanon,s opening session of Parliament as & unacceptable.8 Lebanese news outlets had given the impression that the comments originated in a press release; Charge noted that the remarks had in fact occurred during a press gaggle. Charge made clear to Salloukh, however, that this was the USG position, and reiterated Perino,s other comment that outside interference in Lebanon,s political process should cease and desist. Charge noted that such comments displayed USG concerns, as a

friend of Lebanon, for Lebanon,s future.

ANTI-U.S., ANTI-UN POSTERS

14. (C) The Charge then registered a protest with Salloukh about virulent anti-U.S. and anti-UN posters that had appeared in recent days in Beirut. She showed him photographs of the offending posters taken earlier in the week (some of the poster designs had appeared earlier but others were new). One photo was of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon wearing eyeglasses with Israeli and American pasted over the lenses with a caption that read, "How do you see the truth?" Another photo was of the Secretary depicted as a vampire with a dead baby in front of her, with the slogan "America is the mother of terrorism" printed below. The third had a photo of Ban Ki Moon in front of a mirror showing a reflection of President Bush, with the words "Made by Me" printed below. The fourth showed a collage of faces, including President Bush, the Secretary, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John

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Bolton, former French President Chirac, and Israeli PM Olmert with a caption reading, "Bloodsuckers, they thought they were men and honored them in America. In Lebanon they were defeated in history,s trash can, into which they were thrown." The first three posters were spotted on the highway near UNIFIL house, while the fourth was seen on the airport road. After a few feeble arguments regarding the authenticity of the photos, Salloukh and Siam agreed that the posters were offensive and transgressed the limits of freedom of expression. However, Salloukh argued such posters were "anti-U.S. policy, not anti-American."

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A PLEA TO REACH OUT TO NABIH BERRI; VIEWS ON A SLEIMAN PRESIDENCY

5, (C) Salloukh asked that the Embassy keep the channels of communication open with "all parties," specifically citing Speaker Nabih Berri. Charge reassured Salloukh that she and Embassy staff met regularly with representatives of Amal, including Berri. Berri was "trying his best" to come up with a solution to the ongoing political crisis, said Salloukh. Berri was "the best person" to develop an initiative to reach a solution to the political impasse, he averred. Berri was ready to open the Parliament if a deal on the presidency and cabinet were reached. Gen. Sleiman was the consensus candidate for the presidency, but there needed to be agreement on cabinet formation and a fair and equitable electoral law. If Sleiman were elected without agreement on these two issues, he argued, he would quickly be entrenched in a huge political fight before his term even began, greatly weakening a Sleiman presidency.

SYRIAN INVITATION TO THE ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT

16. (C) Salloukh appeared uncomfortable when the question of the Syrian Deputy FM,s delivery of the Arab League Summit invitation was raised. He joked (after accepting copies of the offending posters) that he would send the Charge out the back door of the Ministry to avoid press "the same way we led the Syrian out yesterday." Salloukh also made an appeal for U.S. public support for the Arab League initiative vis--vis Lebanon.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) By March 16, all but the poster of the Secretary had been removed. By March 18, not even these posters were in view. The UN also complained directly to Hizballah regarding the posters. END COMMENT
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